

Ballad of Birmingham

By [Dudley Randall](#))

“Mother dear, may I go downtown
Instead of out to play,
And march the streets of Birmingham
In a Freedom March today?”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,
For the dogs are fierce and wild,
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails
Aren’t good for a little child.”

“But, mother, I won’t be alone.
Other children will go with me,
And march the streets of Birmingham
To make our country free.”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,
For I fear those guns will fire.
But you may go to church instead
And sing in the children’s choir.”

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,
And bathed rose petal sweet,
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child
Was in the sacred place,
But that smile was the last smile
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,
Her eyes grew wet and wild.
She raced through the streets of Birmingham
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,
Then lifted out a shoe.
“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,
But, baby, where are you?”

Dudley Randall, “Ballad of Birmingham” from *Cities Burning*. Copyright © 1968 by Dudley Randall. Reprinted with the permission of the Estate of Dudley Randall.

Source: *Cities Burning* (Broadside Press, 1968)

Ballad of Birmingham Questions

Read the poem at least twice. When you are finished, answer the questions below.

1. What do you think is happening in this poem?
2. What do you think a “Freedom March” is?
3. In the second paragraph, what is the mother worried about?
4. What does the mother allow her child to do?
5. What happens to her child?
6. What do you think is the mood of the story? (Provide evidence to support your answer.)
7. Pick out three words or phrases that cause a reaction in you. Write them down and explain why you picked them.